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Quantitative Study on Students Satisfaction Concerning Private Economics Universities in Romania

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Abstract

Students satisfaction is a main concern of universities in general and a prior concern of economic private universities in Romania. The study is presenting the level of students satisfaction towards the educational services taking into account their chances of career development after graduation. The research method was surveying a sample of 180 students at the main economic private universities in Bucharest - the biggest university centre and Iasi- the oldest university center in Romania. Determinants and most influencing factors on students' opinions and their recommendations for the improvement of private high education system were made base on the survey results. Also the study is characterizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the private universities in economics field and their perspectives on the academic market in Romania.

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1. Introduction. Current situation of economics private universities in Romania

The purpose of our paper was to characterize the level of satisfaction of students from Business and Economics Romanian private universities, concerning their universities, on one side and the Romanian educational system on the other side. Because the students are seen as the clients of the university (Watty, 2006) its activity is managed taking into account students satisfaction toward teaching programs, educational methods, learning conditions provided, evaluation methods, research activities and success after graduation. Universities are the most extended area of private education in Romania, overlapping private high-schools and secondary schools. Before the Revolution on 1989 statistics showed more than 7 candidates, on average, for one place at the Economic universities (state owned, budgeting all places). This high demand for academic services was solved by the private initiative in the academic field. Autonomy was given to universities and private universities were established in the main cities, starting 1990, aiming to provide employability skills, work-rely experience and strong research background for the graduates. The Romanian private academic education developed teaching program for over 350,000 students of 27 accredited private institutions in Romania in 2011. One important group of the private universities are collecting

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over 80% of all students at economic programs supplied by private universities in Bucharest and Iasi. In order to increase their competitiveness, both public and private universities need to invest into their qualitative development, student' satisfaction being an important part of it, no matter the type of university state or private owned.

2. Research Method

Data collection method chosen in order to gather demographic insights and opinion and information, from the representative sample of students of private universities, who were interviewed (Rotariu and Ilut, 1998) in this statistical survey, is face-to-face interview (Moser, 1961). The chosen tool was a structured undisguised questionnaire which uses different categories of questions, as one choice questions with pre-coded answers, multi-choice questions and binary questions (Moser, 1961). The interviews were conducted at the end of the academic year 2010/2011. Statistical analysis methods used were hypothesis tests for large samples (Thomas, 1997), chi-square test in order to characterize stochastic association (Curvin and Slater, 1991), identifying and characterizing central values (Piatier, 1961), study of the deviations around the central value (Yule and Kendall, 1960) and one way analysis of variance (Kendall and Smith, 1938). Interviews were conducted outside the university campuses in Bucharest and Iasi. Several aspects of the universities were analyzed (Munteanu, Ceobanu, Bobalca et al, 2010): motivating factors to apply, teachers' knowledge and teaching and communication methods. The questionnaire focused mostly on the students' experience (Pop, Bacila, Moisescu et al, 2008) in the private educational system but it could not took into account their experience into a public university because only an insignificant number of 7 students were enrolled at different economic programs into a private university and into a public university in the same time. As a consequence, aspects of the private university system could not be compared to the public system, this being a limitation on of the paper. It is important to determine main students' dissatisfaction factors in order to improve the activity and services provided by private universities.

3. Sample profile

In order to ensure a wide number of respondents from various universities in the typical academic cities, the size of the sample was of 180 students from private universities in two typical academic cities were private universities were founded, Bucharest, with the biggest number of private universities providing economics bachelor programs and Iasi, the oldest academic city in Romania. Independent demographic variables were used in order to obtain a structure of the sample similar with the one of the mother population: gender, age, year of study, and the city. As far as the gender is concerned, 43% of the respondents are males and 57% females. Age range lies between 18 to 24 years old with an average of e age of 21 .9 years and a standard deviation of 2.3 years. Students interviewed have different high-school education background, were equally selected all years of study and of different gender and ages in respect with the structure of students enrolled by the group of private universities considered. As Bucharest is the city with the highest number of private universities, it has the highest 84% of interviews. For 94 % os sampe students the faculty at they are know is the only faculty they are registered, only 5 students choosing also a second faculty with a major different profiles from the ones studied at the private faculties: Police Academy, Political Studies, Law Faculty and economic sciences state owned universities.

4. Survey Results

4.1. Overall direction of their university and the Romanian academic system

The first question has the aim of introducing the respondent in the field of the research and it is regarding their opinion towards the overall direction in which their university is going and the Romanian educational system is heading. In order to evaluate better the satisfaction of the students regarding their actual university, meaning if they are overall satisfied with the services they are currently receiving or if they really find there what they were expecting when they chose the faculty, we included in the questionnaire the set of questions related to the hypothetical idea that if students had the opportunity to choose once again the university, it would be the same or not. After analyzing the answers, we find out that 79% of the students would chose the same university, while the rest of 21% are neither so satisfied nor willing to make the same decision. A small part of 17 students that would not make the same decision all over again, would decide to chose a public universsity mainly because of the discovery of skills in other areas not covered by their innitial university or the desire to study abroad. Several research hypothesises were tested. A first hypothesis is that that there is no relationship between the year of study and the overall opinion on the effectiveness of direction taken by the university. The chi-square test provided a low significance value, below 0.05 so this means that the null hypothesis is rejected in 95 % of cases, and the overall opinion on the correctness and effectiveness of the university direction is different from a year to another year. Majority of the first year students (68%) answered that “the university goes into a good direction”. Junior students are more optimistic and trustful in the overall quality of the services provided, mainly to the aggressive marketing campaigns on the Romanian academic education market, were public state universities are allocating insignificant budgets for marketing themselves. When the students were asked if the Romanian educational system goes in a good direction or not, only 86 of them said that the direction is good and favorable for their development, these students being satisfied by the Romanian educational system.

4.2. Motivation when choosing the university

Among the factors influencing the decision to follow an universty program, people surrounding the respondents are active players. Being asked to indicate who were factors influencing their choice of faculty, the majority of them (51%) said that the professionals they know played a big role in advising them about the faculty they should choose, 25% declared that they were influenced by their families, 21% considered that friends and/or high school teachers had a significant influence and on the last place, we identified 15 students who decided which academic program to follow using only the information available on the universities web sites. An aspect that has been emphasize is the fact the enrollment period in the first year ended long after the adimission process at similar public owned universities, this implied that a large number of student whose application was denied by the state university applied and enrolled at a the private one.

4.3. Satisfaction level on main aspects: teaching, research and infrastructure

The questionnaire assesses the satisfaction of students towards several aspects of the educational system considered satisfaction dimensions (Munteanu, Bobalca, Anton, 2007). They were asked to assign grades from 1- representing a very low performance to 5 – very high performance to each one of the indicated issues: academic curricula, schedule, number of classes duration during a week, professors’ level of knowledge, professors’ teaching skills of sharing knowledge and faculty infrastructure, to reflect their opinion towards the performance and the quality of each item. Central tendency measures were summarize into Table1, bellow. For the academic curricula, the average value was between medium and good apraisal, with a standard deviation, showing a week variation and indicating a high level of homogeneity of opinions on the academic curricula. So students have close positive opinion on the quality of curricula. As improvement directions more practical courses and a more in depth

specialization program is requested. The students' most declared purpose is to have chances for a successful career not only on the Romanian labour market after graduation and also on the European labour market.

Table 1. Central measures computation for main satisfaction issues

Item – Satisfaction dimension	Average satisfaction level (average score)	Standard deviation	Modal score
Academic curricula	3.4	0.78	3
Daily schedule	2.89	0.96	3
Weekly schedule	3.2	1.1	4
Professors' level of knowledge	4.25	0.88	5
Auto-evaluated student' level	2.87	0.63	3
Professors' teaching skills	3.7	1.4	3
Faculty infrastructure and conditions	4.42	0.95	5

The second important factor for the students is to be able to use the knowledge gathered during faculty in real economic life after graduation, so that they could develop a long life career. Therefore theoretical knowledge should be, in their opinion, completed with practical activity and research. Students are complaining that they have to learn and remember too much theoretical knowledge (on average 69 % of them, no matter the year of study) that they will not use in their future careers. According to their interests, optional sets of disciplines should be provided, so each student could select the appropriate subjects and hours of study according to student plans of career. For the weekly schedule, the average evaluation is lower almost at the medium level of satisfaction 3.2 with a s.d. of 1.1 points, with the modal mark chosen 4 (high level of satisfaction) while for the daily schedule students gave a smaller mark 2.89 with a standard deviation is 0.96 indicating also a representative opinion and similarities among the sample of students. They tended to be unsatisfied with the evaluation methods but were reluctant to answer questions about it (the biggest rate on non-response, 77%). Assessing professors' level of knowledge by students provides an average score of 4.25 points, with a standard deviation of 0.88 points, indicating a very big level of homogeneity and a highly representative mean. This variable is highly influencing together with the abilities to communicate and to provide feedback to student, as explanatory variables, the autoevaluated level of the student, as explained variable, even if this one has been subjectively self-evaluated by each student. We want to check if different levels of overall evaluated professors' knowledge score and abilities to communicate scores are significantly influencing the autoevaluated students' level.

Table 2. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.693	.48025	.367	.49

^a Predictors: (Constant), Dependent on *Professors' Knowledge level, Professors' communication abilities*.

The explanatory variables explain only 48.02% out of the variance of *Auto-evaluated students level*. It means that the rest of the variation is due to other determinants, as the student learning skills, high-school background, number of hours to study and the facilities provided by the university

The average mark used to evaluate professors' teaching skills is lower, measured on average with the score 3.7 and a standard deviation of 1.43, which means that the opinion of students are not similar. Interactive teaching methods are considered the way to improve the teaching effectiveness because they declare that "students learn more when given an opportunity to process and apply what they have been learning" and retain more if they review or use the information immediately after learning it. Also the group work is preferred for research activities, because "it is stimulating individual opportunity for peer instruction" and the learners obtain feedback from different points of view. The average mark used to evaluate the faculty infrastructure and conditions provided, which is represented by the teaching conditions, presentation equipments, laboratories, IT, free Internet acces, multimedia lecture rooms, etc. is 4.425 with the standard deviation less than one point (0.92), a very good satisfaction about the teaching/learning conditions, similarly declared by students, no matter the city and the year of study. The quality of infrastructure is seen to be improved mainly through accesing research funding. The following issue is referring to their actions intended after graduation, and on the first place the result were to continue the studies at a post-graduate Master program (76%) at the same university (90%) and getting a job exclusively (35)%, but not with the intention of doing both activities in the same time except for 18% of students. The last question asked students' opinion about the changes that should take place in the Romanian private univesity in their view in order to improve it, provided the highest rate of nonresponses, of 30%. The remaining 126 students named and detailed the aspects that require improvement and it was possible to establish a top 3 areas. Firstly, the share between theory and practice should balance in favour of practical activity, mainly funded by research investors, secondly, contineous training program for improvement of teachers' communication capabilities, and implementation of a systematical feed-back communication system between teachers and students.

5. Conclusions. Improvement directions

One of the main aspects revealed by this paper is the high students' satisfaction level within the space of private higher education reality in Romanian, taking into account that comparative approaches of the public and private universities are missing in the Romanian educational studies, as well as the quantitative validation of general hypothesis regarding satisfaction issues in private owned universities. Many rumors among students, almost as "students folklore sayings", should be more in-depth researched, in order to break down the vicious spiral of traditional preconceptions, students' self-appreciative attitudes and stereotypes. The majority of students complain that they have to store too much theoretical knowledge that they will not use it in their future careers. Moreover the relationships between students and teachers should be improved, by involving them together into research and business laboratories. The Romanian economic private higher educational system apparently has some negative features in students' opinion, but the Statistics-based research proves that private academic world in two main Romanian cities is happy with its overall activity, proud about it and aware of the importance of real connections between academics and economic actors.

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